

Opening Statement

JEC Hearing on “Building a Better Labor Market: Empowering Older Workers for a Stronger Economy”

Wednesday, February 9 at 2:30pm ET

Older Americans are the bedrock of our communities. It's hard to overstate their role. We rely on our grandparents for everything, from helping to care for our children to building our churches and volunteering at our local charities.

Increasingly, older Americans also make vital contributions in the workforce. More of America's seniors are choosing to work because they find work to be a source of engagement and meaning in the transition to their golden years.

Tad Greener is a fellow Utahn who was missing the social connections and professional satisfaction of work after being out of a job for the past two years due to his health. Like so many other older Americans, when he started looking for a job again, he thought he'd never get a leg up navigating the endless changes brought on by the pandemic.

That's when Tad saw a story about Return Utah—a new program created by Utah's Lieutenant Governor Deidre Henderson to help Utahns who are looking for work after an extended absence. Tad applied and was surprised to

find that the Utah Office of Energy Development needed someone with his technical skills. Although the position was temporary, after just two months into the job, he was made a permanent team member and is now able to put his years of experience to use.

Tad's story is inspiring for the millions of American workers who are still on the sidelines, and it's instructive for us today as we seek to understand the barriers older Americans face. As many choose to work longer, a strong labor market with rising wages for all is the most effective way to create new opportunities and support older Americans.

The good news for us today is that older Americans are doing better than they ever have before. Thanks to improved health and less physically demanding jobs, many older Americans are remaining in the workforce longer, and more employers are benefiting from their reliability and experience.

Older Americans who choose to retire are also better set up for economic security than ever before. Americans have never saved more for retirement or had higher incomes in their golden years. Poverty among seniors is lower than among any other age group, and the preliminary data indicate that those who left the workforce during the pandemic did so because they can better afford to retire.

Older workers are doing remarkably well. What older workers don't need are new, special-interest programs and policies cooked up in Washington and delivered half-baked by bureaucrats from thousands of miles away.

First, let's fix what's broken.

Government spending has stoked the highest inflation rate this country has seen in four decades, and it's hurting all Americans, including our seniors—many of whom live on fixed incomes. Government programs intended to care for seniors often punish those who want to stay connected to the workforce longer. And the threat of vaccine mandates continues to hang over our country, cruelly forcing Americans to choose between the freedom to make their own health decisions and their jobs.

Ultimately, a thriving, unencumbered economy is the best way to allow older Americans to make the choices best suited for themselves and their families—whether that's spending more time with the kids and grandkids, volunteering in a local congregation, maintaining a long healthy working life, or all of the above. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how we can foster this type of prosperity.

Thank you.